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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 000764

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IV

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE'S GOVERNMENT DRIFTS AFTER ATTACK ON  
SORO; WAITING FOR NEWS FROM NEW YORK

REF: A. ABIDJAN 755

1B. ABIDJAN 732

1C. ABIDJAN 719

Classified By: Acting PolEconChief EMassinga, Reason 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. Since the March 29 attack on the aircraft carrying Prime Minister Soro, the peace process implementation has been at a near-standstill. Soro and his small team appear knocked off stride (although he could be "playing possum" and proceeding cautiously while recovering his footing). The notion of bringing Burkinabe troops to Abidjan to protect Soro appears to be definitively squashed. The Armed Forces of Cote d'Ivoire (loyal to President Gbagbo) have seized on the controversy around control and security at airports to marginalize ONUCI and LICORNE's role at the Abidjan airport, a symbolic, if incremental, victory in the incessant Gbagbo-international community chessmatch. Meanwhile, the government has issued a request for an international investigation of the Soro attack, despite the low likelihood such a probe will produce concrete results. Redeployment of prefects and magistrates is moving ahead, but very slowly, pushing off the date in which the identification courts can realistically start their work. End Summary.

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Soro - Shell-shocked or Proceeding Cautiously?  
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12. (C) The topic du jour among the chattering classes is the state of mind of PM Soro. As reported in (reftel B), Soro was keen to discuss the events of June 29 at length with all of his interlocutors for many days after the attack. The PM describes it in minute detail, and has made it the sole topic of all of his governmental actions, scheduling an extraordinary Council of Government (presided over by President Gbagbo) on July 11, after discussing it in a closed-door meeting with Burkina Faso President and Ouaga Accord facilitator Compaore in Ouagadougou last week before his return to Abidjan. Many are questioning whether Soro has been unhinged in the attack and knocked off balance, unable to drive the peace process forward or counterweigh President Gbagbo (Note: Emboffs have seen the unpublished, but widely circulated, gruesome photos of plane's interior. It would be understandable if Soro were deeply affected by the attack, even if being seen as dwelling on it would be politically damaging. End Note)

¶13. (C) Reinforcing the sense that the PM has been seriously bruised by the attack in Bouake is seeing his key advisors in clear disarray. Emboffs have been unable to get in contact with Soro's inner circle, highlighting just how small that circle was even before June 29. Tourism Minister and Forces Nouvelles spokesman Sidiki Konate and PM Special Advisor Lobognon are unavailable: Lobognon recently got out of hospital and is recuperating, while Konate carries the load of acting as the PM's chief operative alone, and is seemingly overwhelmed by press and the crush of business. Dacoury Tabley, Minister of War Victims and Solidarity, reputed Forces Nouvelles number 2 civilian leader and chief negotiator of the Ouaga Accord, has been on absolute radio silence since the Bouake incident. The PM's bench is thinner than ever, while that of the President remains comparatively deep.

¶14. (C) Another interpretation, however, is that the PM is proceeding deliberately and cautiously in the wake of the Bouake attack. He remained outside of Abidjan for 10 days, a move that cannot help but suggest at least some mistrust of the President or his entourage. He has forced the Gbagbo to address (or at least pay lip service) to his concerns through the latter's grudging acceptance of a request to the United Nations for a international investigator (retel A). If Soro were to harbor mistrust towards Gbagbo and also suffer from exacerbated personnel weaknesses, perhaps his slow, deliberate pace suits the circumstances.

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Burkina Troops to Protect Soro?  
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¶15. (C) During Soro's trip to Ouagadougou after the attack,  
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it was very widely speculated that he would return with a contingent of Burkinabe paratroop commandos to bolster his security retinue. Even well-placed ONUCI sources the day of his arrival were unsure if he would bring a contingent of "blue berets." Since then, such speculation has continued, but has apparently been put definitively to rest by Konate, who said on July 12 that protection offered by Ivorian armed forces is more than sufficient.

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ONUCI and FANCI Dispute Control over Abidjan Airport  
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¶16. (C) On July 9, General Mangou of the FANCI issued seven orders as part of efforts to "reinforce security" at the Abidjan airport. The demands included exclusive ASECNA (the regional air control consortium) control over and a ban on armed personnel in the radar tower, the dismantling of LICORNE's Milan surface-to-air system at the airport, prohibition of "impartial forces" armored vehicles from patrolling the perimeter and the dismantling an impartial forces bunker and another structure on the airport grounds itself. The moves caused some grumblings, as part of the mission of the impartial forces at the airport (as well as their presence at the Yamoussoukro and Bouake airports as well) is to monitor and interdict illicit arms shipments as well as ensure the integrity of ONUCI's ability to move freely. Post understands the SAM positions have been removed, but that armor remains around the perimeter (France's 43rd battalion HQ is next door to the airport). DATT sources indicate ONUCI, LICORNE and FANCI senior officials continue to meet to work out the practical implications of Mangou's decrees.

¶17. (C) The controversy over the control of the Abidjan airport serves two purposes for the President. First and foremost, it allows him to take yet another incremental, but important step, in marginalizing the role and powers of the impartial forces. Second, it allows him to make the subtle point that ONUCI and LICORNE failed to ensure airport

security in the Bouake incident, despite the evident confusion over who exactly was in charge.

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International Investigation of the Attack  
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18. (C) In a July 10 meeting with Presidential diplomatic advisor Ottra Toure, Emboff was told that the President had "no objections" to an international inquiry into the attack on Soro. President Gbagbo reiterated that stance directly in a meeting with Ambassador Hooks, and the Foreign Minister Bakayoko formally handed the request to ONUCI Deputy Carpenter on July 12 for transmittal to the UNSC. Note: While President Gbagbo may feign exasperation with the notion of a special international investigator, it appears he knows, and the PM should know, that such an investigation is unlikely to result in accusations hard enough to lead to indictments. Not only does the President's outward show of eagerness to accept a UN role in investigating the matter make the deputy Forces Nouvelles military commander Wattao look foolish, but it also serves, to a certain extent, to inoculate the President from suspicion.

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Progress Slow on Pushing Peace Process Forward  
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19. (C) The June 29 attack unquestionably slowed the implementation of the peace process. DDR is stalled until at least July 30, when the rescheduled "Flame of Peace" will see Soro and Gbagbo hosting Presidents Compaore and Mbeki. The mobile identification courts cannot start until magistrates and prefets are put into place in the North; while this week we did see the prefect in Korhogo (third largest city in Cote d'Ivoire) assigned to his post, the overall process remains painfully slow. Magistrates openly complained about the need to be compensated for the "moral shock" caused by the Soro attack before they will take up their Northern posts.

10. (C) Meanwhile, the UNSC is expected to take up the French draft of ONUCI's mandate renewal on July 16.

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Political actors and observers are waiting for its results, along with some sense of how the request for an international investigation will be handled, as well as for the long-awaited naming of a new Special Representative from the Secretary General.

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11. (C) Comment. The attack on PM Soro continues to dominate the scene here, both through the resulting paralysis in the PM's camp and manner in which the President has been able to exploit the opportunities presented. Observers here look for news from NYC, the July 30 "Flame of Peace," as well as upcoming decisions by the World Bank and IMF on post-conflict financing to breath new life into the stalled process. End Comment.

HOOKS